



AUSTRALIAN  
CAMPS ASSOCIATION®  
More people outdoors more often



Christian  
Venues  
Association  
experience the spirit of sharing

## OPEN LETTER

# AN INDUSTRY DESTROYED THROUGH IGNORANCE

30 November 2021

Imagine your school life without school camps, leadership camps, Duke of Edinburgh programs... well it's more likely than you think.

As the New South Wales Premier Dominic Perrottet vows to stick with the plans for further re-opening on December 15<sup>th</sup> from COVID-19 restrictions, an industry goes unnoticed, stopped from trading, in a blatant omission in policy change and ignored despite the number of cries for help to keep staff employed and keep businesses afloat.

Able to operate under Public Health Orders, our camp providers go unnoticed as public policy restricting NSW Department of Education schools from partaking in overnight educational opportunities; their main, if not their only, customers.

However, the worst part of this situation is not the thousands of lost jobs nor the number of businesses about to fail but the sheer ignorance of what this industry does for our youth in Outdoor Education throughout a school year; prevention of mental health issues, providing social and leadership skills, skills for life and building resilience in our youth as well as creating lifelong memories. The Outdoor Industry is calling all to stand up for our youth, our jobs and our businesses as the NSW Department of Health restrict the resumption of overnight excursions and outdoor education in all public schools.

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This week is the last week of term for many private schools and we are very close to the end of term for public schools. These schools are now unable to confirm plans with any certainty for Term 1 in 2022 to include overnight activities as the NSW government continue to out rule providing a roadmap of when school coordinated overnight activities can resume.

For much of the past two years, our children from ages 5 to 18 have lost out on so much of what we had previously taken for granted. Their schooling has been broken, face-to-face contact with friends or family removed, and sports or creative outlets non-existent. They have missed out on crucial social interactions, outdoor education, leaving their interpersonal and mental health severely compromised. Camps allow individuals to rebuild confidence and reconnect with others, learn life skills and resilience; relationships can blossom when trust is rebuilt, and bonds are reformed. Do you remember your math class or your school camp? Yep, memories these children have lost because they couldn't even partake.

It's too late to resume school camps and overnight outdoor education in 2021, but not too late to resume in 2022. It's too late to recoup the 8,000 staff that have lost their jobs but not too late to keep the remaining staff and provide opportunity to recruit new employees. It's too late to recoup income lost since schools went back to face-to-face in November but it's not too late to provide financial assistance to these businesses to remain open so it can service the needs of our youth in 2022 and beyond.

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The net benefits of relationship repair and personal growth far outweigh any perceived risk by those in authority who are currently deeming school camps unsafe. Victoria allowed school camps to resume from the moment face-to-face learning took place as they understand the benefits of this activity for all age groups. The same applied to Queensland after their lockdowns earlier in 2021.

A typical school group on a residential camp is peopled with children who are from a single cohort, undertaking activities, eating, and sharing accommodation together, and not mixing with others during their stay. In essence, a mini lockdown where the total possible interactions with others remain static, with the added benefit of most activity be held in the outdoors.

Conversely, the average movements and interactions of uncontrolled cohorts who are now permitted to attend school every day, use multiple modes of transport to and from school, interact with multiple teachers and staff, who also have multiple interactions, and spend most of the day indoors. The idea that camping is somehow of greater risk to infection control is farcical.

Currently, the NSW Department of Health is standing firm and refuses to permit the reopening of camping to school groups. Yet, the planning and attending of camps is ultimately a question of choice. The schools and the parents can choose to make these plans on their own time but are not currently given the opportunity to make an informed choice in their child's education. Camps are open and successfully running with other groups from the community, why not school groups?

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To date camp providers have lost 71% of their staff since 2020 and should they not return for Term 1 2022, they will be reduced in most cases to none without financial support.

Remember we are not just talking about social camps. This industry provides Duke of Edinburgh programs (21.9%), leadership camps (8.2%), physical health education (24.1%), environment & outdoor elective education (5.7%) and outdoor recreation experiences (40.1%) that provide opportunities of connection for long-term engagement in the activities.

In 2020, there were 1,241,962 school students in NSW, of which 729,705 were in the years where they experience some sort of outdoor education experience. Ordinarily this would equate to over \$200 Million worth of business to the industry. Income has now reduced to \$0 as of today (30<sup>th</sup> November) as grants cease completely from the NSW and Federal Government.

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3,107 schools have relied on the services of our industry for many different outdoor education opportunities that are delivered by experienced, qualified, and passionate educators.

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When we asked our camp providers on 26 November 2021 what would happen if they did not have their schools return in Term 1, the answers were transparent.

- *“Devastating! We would have to consider whether to continue operating.”*
  - *“We will struggle to survive”*
  - *“I would remain the only person employed”*
  - *“We would have to consider selling assets and this would make recovery even more difficult.”*
  - *“Sydney schools will not have their usual Duke of Ed Adventurous Journeys”*
  - *“We can only keep doing this at the expense of our personal and financial wellbeing for so long. It is hard always being in a small forgotten industry .... We have grant application fatigue and are pretty exhausted.”*
  - *“We have struggled through 14 months of restriction of trade over past 2 years! If we don't get back to camps we are close to not reopening again!”*
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If our camp facilities have COVIDSafe plans that keep school groups separate, year cohort groups separate, and they continue to adopt all hygiene and social distancing measures then why are they being held back from their customers? Is it sheer ignorance of our activities, our benefit for the youth or understanding of our industry?

Either way, we need to ask for immediate financial help to remain open until our customers are allowed to return... the benefits of our industry cannot be ignored any longer! And then a clear pathway for when we can return to camp, so we have time to recruit, retrain, reengage our staff and be ready to provide the impeccable opportunities for our youth again.

Sincerely



**Lori Modde**  
Outdoors NSW & ACT



**Graeme Janes**  
Christian Venues Assoc



**Rod Thomson**  
Australian Camps Assoc

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2020 DATA ON OUTDOOR EDUCATION

NSW		Years
	810,705 students	K-12
	431,257 non-gov students	K-12
	1,241,962 Total	

Camps Run Years 4 - 11

729,705 Students in camp years

3,107 schools in NSW

88 estimated camp facilities in NSW

210 estimated businesses that supply supplementary activities

76,000 Employees in the Outdoor Industry\*

38,000 Estimated employees in Outdoor Education\*

\*2018 data

**Outdoor Education involves;**

- Year group camps	40.1%
- Leadership camps	8.2%
- PDHPE / Geography Studies	24.1%
- Duke of Edinbrough Awards	21.9%
- Outdoor Education Electives	5.7%
	100.0%

**Average Camp Experience is**

2.3 days

**Operational Days**

- School Terms
- Duke of Edinbrough use some days in School Holidays to conduct expedition

# Less Transmission Risk on Camp than at School




AUSTRALIAN CAMPS ASSOCIATION  
More quality experiences. More often.





## A WEEK AT SCHOOL

5x transports to school with multiple, uncontrolled cohorts 

Interact with teachers who mix with other cohorts 


Spend majority of day indoors 


5 x leave school Mingle with others in local park 

5x transports home with multiple, uncontrolled cohorts 


Mix with family including siblings in other year groups 

## A WEEK AT CAMP



1 x bus to camp with a single cohort 

Interact with teachers and facilitators, dedicated to a single cohort for the entire camp 


Spend majority of time outdoors 

Sleep in same room as those in activity group, similar to boarding schools' requirement 

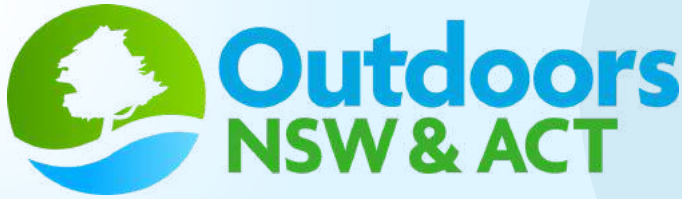
1 x Bus back to school 

**TOTAL INTERACTIONS** 15x  10x 



**TOTAL INTERACTIONS** 1x  2x 





# Industry Update

SEPT 2021

Less than 5% of our industry has been active or trading for the first 3 months of the 2021/2022 financial year



NSW & ACT Outdoor Sector businesses on average rely on the Greater Sydney market by 76%



## 76%

Workforce Capacity

Pre-Extended Lockdown 2021, the NSW & ACT Outdoor Industry was **down 24%** in workers to cope with pre-lockdown demand.



## 49%

Workforce Capacity

Post-Extended Lockdown 2021, the NSW & ACT Outdoor Industry is estimated to be **51% down** on workers to cope with pre-lockdown demand.

COVID HAS TAUGHT OUR COMMUNITIES MANY THINGS BUT ONE THAT WE CANNOT IGNORE IS THE IMPORTANCE OF THE OUTDOORS FOR OUR HEALTH AND WELLBEING  
THIS COMES IN THE FORM OF RECREATION, EDUCATION, LEISURE, AND THERAPY.



1,000's jobs available



Fastracked skills required



When activity recommences, a focus on process & procedure needs considerable attention due to inactivity





# 2019

## OUTDOOR RECREATION

This sector is made up of professional guides and volunteer groups. Involves regular activity or one-off opportunities for nature engagement and exercise.



## OUTDOOR EDUCATIONAL TOURISM

**448,499\***

The number of kids that normally participate in camp each year in NSW & ACT, this does not include special OE programs such as Duke of Edinburgh. \*NSW only



## OUTDOOR THERAPY

The newest and fast growing area of the outdoors, the therapy area connects all people including those with special needs or health challenges to nature.



## ADVENTURE TOURISM

18% of all visitors to the ACT (1.1M people) engage in outdoor adventures & 37M visitors to NSW\* equating to expenditure of close to \$25B across NSW & the ACT.

\*Dec 2019 data.



# 2021

↓36%

Volunteers are challenged with priorities where volunteering is no longer a priority

-320,000

Term 3 no camps or activity ...  
Term 4 is expected to have no camps or activity to resume

↓ACCESS

Due to lockdowns the therapy businesses have not been able to provide essential access for health benefits

\$25B to \$0

For the first 3 months of the year, tourism has not been able to operate or had no visitors due to lockdowns & border closures

THE OUTDOOR INDUSTRY HAS SUFFERED INCREDIBLE CHALLENGES WITH PUBLIC HEALTH ORDERS AND THE REGIONAL LOCKDOWNS.

THE CONTENT HERE CAPTURES THE SUMMARY OF THE INDUSTRY AS OF SEPTEMBER 2021.



[WWW.OUTDOORSNSWACT.ORG](http://WWW.OUTDOORSNSWACT.ORG)



**Outdoors**  
NSW & ACT

# Benefits of Outdoors Education

THE UNDENIABLE FACTS



**Forbes,**  
**July 2018**

University of East Anglia

"Spending more time in green spaces was linked to reduced levels of the stress hormone cortisol, lower heart rate, reduced risk of coronary heart disease, lower blood pressure, lower cholesterol, reduced risk of type II diabetes, reduced all-cause mortality and death from heart disease....Among all the participants, on average, there was an increased likelihood of self-reporting one's health as "good.""

**Outdoor Youth Programs  
Research Alliance  
(OYPRA)**

**Dec 2018**

"the sharp rise in the youth anxiety and mental health challenges can be improved through participating in outdoor programs. In addition, the students improved confidence, self-efficacy and increased belief to achieve their goals after the participation in outdoor programs. Data that is incredibly hard to argue against and endorsed by leading universities including the Murdoch Childrens Research Institute."

**U.S. Department of Health  
and Human Services**  
**2018**

"Regular physical activity in childhood and adolescence improves strength and endurance, helps build healthy bones and muscles, helps control weight, improves cognitive function, reduces the risk of depression, and may improve cardiovascular health."

"Of those who participated...16% of students suffered higher levels of anxiety, however, were significantly less anxious after the 5-day outdoor program... 11% of students surveyed had low levels of self-efficacy; however, following a 5-day school camp, their confidence levels were significantly boosted."

**Murdoch Children's  
Research Institute**  
**Oct 2018**

OVER DECADES, MANY WORDS HAVE BEEN USED TO DESCRIBE THE BENEFITS OF "STRUCTURED OUTDOOR, CAMPS AND NATURE-BASED PROGRAMS".

**CHARACTER TRAINING, SKILLS FOR LIFE, RESILIENCE TRAINING** ARE SOME OF THESE, BUT IT IS THE EVIDENCE-BASED RESEARCH THAT PROVIDE PROOF INTO WHY WE NEED TO HAVE "MORE KIDS OUTDOORS MORE OFTEN".